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American Born Chinese

Have you ever read such a good story that made you want to go back and read it again? Gene Yang’s graphic novel, “American Born Chinese,” is one such book. The novel follows three stories: the inspiring tale of a famed Chinese icon, the Monkey King; the story of Jin, a troubled young Asian boy struggling to fit into a new school; and the story of Danny, a high-school student trying to hold up a good reputation while visited by his cousin, Chin-Kee, who is the epitome of terrible Asian stereotype.

The Monkey-King's tale may remind you of stories you were told as a child. In this age-old parable of finding your true self, the Monkey-King starts out the sovereign ruler of Flower-Fruit Mountain and all of its inhabitants. But in a tragic turn of events, the Monkey King finds himself striving to become something better than his current status. He takes on the transformation from "Monkey-King" into "Great Sage, Equal of Heaven". Will the Monkey-King ever go back to find who he really is? This story explores the concept of staying true to yourself, and teaches us a valuable life-lesson that has been carried on for generations.

Then there is the heartwarming story of Jin. Jin is a Chinese-American boy who moves to a predominantly white school and is having trouble adjusting. Kids tease him and bully him because of his race. For the first couple of months at the school, Jin hasn't made any friends at all. But once a new student, Wei-Chen, moves in from Taiwan, he and Jin become fast friends. We follow Jin and Wei-Chen from elementary school all the way to seventh grade, where the pressure of social status and even girls come into play. In the course of this coming-of-age story, we are taught lessons dealing with cultural and self-acceptance.

We know about how Asians are often potrayed in television and the media. The story of Danny and cousin Chin-Kee is fashioned in a sitcom format, even including a laugh-track written right into the page. Once Danny, a normal high-school student, is unexpectedly visited by his cousin Chin-Kee, his social life goes down the drain. This annoying, buck-toothed Asian is supposed to increase our understanding of how us Americans stereotype Asians in the media.

I enjoyed reading this book very much because it was meaningful and easy to read. I take away from this book the ability to recognize negative and positive stereotyping when I see it. I would recommend this book to anyone who is looking for a good, insightful read.